



DHS Matters!

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Michigan joins national campaign to reduce poverty and promote economic security

Lansing – The Michigan Community Action Agency Association joined agencies across the nation in a campaign to reduce poverty at a news conference in Lansing Jan. 9. The event promoted a new report – “Rooting Out Poverty: A Campaign by America’s Community Action Network” – a call for action to promote economic security for all Americans, especially those who are poor. The events took place on the 44th anniversary of U.S. President Lyndon Johnson’s war on poverty, which the late president officially unveiled on Jan. 8, 1964.



Ronald Borngesser

Photo credits: Mike Shalley

Ronald Borngesser, president of the Michigan Community Action Agency Association and executive director of the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency, said community action agencies were developed in 1964 as part of the war on poverty. “Still, 44 years later, millions live in poverty,” he said. “We are confident the report suggestions will benefit Michigan and provide a blueprint for enhancing the lives of our low-income families.”

The report offers five themes and two dozen recommendations and strategies to help reduce poverty and other barriers to economic self-sufficiency in these areas:

- Maximize participation - involve everyone in the community.
- Build an economy that works for everyone.
- Invest in the future - in training, knowledge and skill development.
- Maximize equality of opportunity - ensure opportunity is accessible and promoted.
- Ensure healthy people and places - adequate health care and homes that are weatherized to prevent high heating and cooling costs.



Stacie Gibson

“I applaud the Community Action Partnership and support its efforts to reduce poverty,” DHS Director Ismael Ahmed said through a statement read by **Stacie Gibson**. Gibson is acting director of DHS Bureau of Community Action and Economic Opportunity, which has an administrative relationship with community action agencies.



Daniel Piepszowski

“Poverty is the most important issue of our time. About 20 percent of people in Michigan, including a half-million children, live in or near poverty. Almost 30 percent of people in Michigan live in low-income families. Today’s report and call to action is a ray of hope for a better tomorrow for all Michigan families.

“Poverty is the root of many serious social problems including the mortgage foreclosure crisis, hunger, lack of medical coverage, and homelessness. It robs people of their human potential.”

Other speakers at the event included

James Crisp, executive director of Michigan Community Action Agency Association, and Daniel Piepszowski, a member of Michigan Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity, a governor-appointed commission that held a half-dozen poverty forums around Michigan since December to hear from low-income persons on ways to reduce poverty. The forum outcomes will form part of Michigan’s first poverty forum to be held in November.

The Michigan Community Action Agency Association represents the state’s 30 community action agencies that provide anti-poverty and human services programs in all 83 Michigan counties. Based in Washington, DC, the Community Action Partnership is the national association representing the interests of the 1,000 community action agencies across the country that are helping low-income people change their lives and embody the spirit of hope.

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On the wings of an angel

From Rose Madsen

Oceana DHS, Hart

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Federico Martinez of The Muskegon Chronicle wrote this for the Dec. 31, 2007 edition. It is published with permission and edited for space.

To thousands of people of Mexican descent in the U.S. and Mexico, she's affectionately known as "la Angel Gringa," which loosely translated means "the White Angel." **Penny Burillo** of Hart earned that nickname because she's been at the forefront of the battle for migrant farm worker and immigrant rights for the past 30 years.



Cory Morse and Juan Martinez of Okemos poses with **Penny Burillo** for a picture taken by his wife during Burillo's retirement party at Oceana County DHS last December. Burillo worked for the state for 30 years.

Muskegon Chronicle photo used with permission

Mexican nationals who need legal documentation to cash paychecks or open checking accounts while living and working in the United States. The ID cards also help police identify them during emergencies. The cards, which are distributed by the Mexican government, have been in use in Michigan, Florida and other states that have large migrant and Mexican populations for several years. After returning from Mexico, Burillo helped organize some of the U.S. Mexican Consulate office's first visits to West Michigan so immigrants living legally in Michigan could more conveniently renew green cards. Previously, everyone had to go to the consulate's Detroit headquarters to turn in paperwork.

"I remember her visiting the migrant camps when I was 14," said Jose Barco, whose family are former migrant workers. "I thought it was funny that a 'gringa' knew Spanish. It blew me away." It also inspired Barco because he followed in Burillo's footsteps and now works as a migrant outreach worker for the Oceana County FIA.

Daughter Catalina Burillo said her mother has always been a tireless advocate for migrant workers. As Catalina grew up, it wasn't uncommon to have migrant families show up at their doorstep when they had no food or place to live. Her mother always welcomed them into their home, she said.

"That's just who she is," said Catalina, who now helps farm workers find jobs through her position (with) Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth in Shelby. "She's always been a humanitarian," Catalina said. "You don't find many Pennys in the world."

Burillo's efforts were recognized at a retirement party in her honor Dec. 12. Burillo, a longtime Oceana County DHS specialist, retired Dec. 12. Hundreds of Michigan political and religious leaders, migrant and immigration advocates, farmers, friends and community supporters paid homage to Burillo at the event at the Oceana County DHS building in Hart.

Tom Thornberg, managing attorney for Michigan's Farmworker Legal Services, said that when he began his career in 1994, he was told, "there's only one person you need to know if you want to serve farm workers — Penny Burillo."

"She's gone out of her way to assist people when they have problems," said Thornberg, whose office is in Bangor. "They seek her out. If they're stranded, they show up at her doorstep. She's an ambassador of goodwill. She's an angel to farm workers."

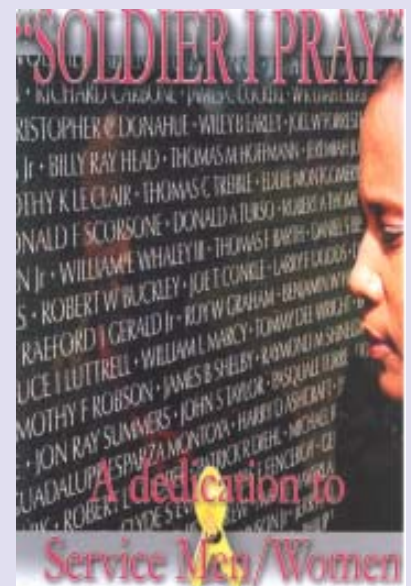
Burillo championed a plan to create identification cards for

Midland County employee creates "Soldier I pray" DVD

From Gezelle Myers
Midland DHS, Midland
MyersG@michigan.gov

Gezelle Myers, a foster care licensing specialist from Midland County DHS, created a new pictorial DVD and an accompanying inspirational song called "Soldier I pray."

"I composed the song to represent my gratitude to past and present soldiers," Myers said. "It is meant to uplift, encourage and inspire, particularly those who have served our country and the families of soldiers."



Contact Myers at MyersG@michigan.gov for information on its availability.



Christmas wishes came true for Oakland kids

A recap of charitable giving from Oakland County

From Lynn Contreras
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Thanks to generous sponsors again this year, we raised more than \$20,000 in cash and gifts for our kids in foster care and juvenile justice youths. Some of our very generous sponsors from the previous year came through for us again, plus some new folks came on board. North American Bancard of Troy blew us away again by sponsoring 150 kids and the staff at Redico Management in Southfield increased their sponsorship from last year with their sponsorship of over 60 teens this year. This group makes personalized stockings for each youth filled with goodies and generous gift cards.

In addition to the children in foster care enjoying gifts and goodies, about 65 low-income families enjoyed a Christmas full of presents for their children and some enjoyed food baskets and all the makings of a great Christmas dinner! The Lady Who Cares Beauty Salon in Pontiac made for a very merry Christmas for a mom and her three children. They purchased toys and new clothing for the children including coats for all as well as new bath towels for the family. The staff from Hi-Tech Dentistry in Waterford sponsored a mom and her seven children with all the gifts on their wish lists – plus coats for the family, small appliances and even a microwave, a turkey and all the trimmings! This generous group thought of everything – right down to providing a camera for the mom to take photos of the kids Christmas morn! And, speaking of turkeys, more than 70 families enjoyed a wonderful Thanksgiving meal courtesy of some kind-hearted sponsors.

Shop With a Hero

Again this year, Meijer in Royal Oak sponsored Shop With a Hero on Dec. 13. This event pairs “heroes” – police officers, firefighters and paramedics – with needy children from the area. Each child is given a \$100 gift card to purchase Christmas presents. Thirty children and their families receiving services through our CPS and prevention programs participated in this event. Everyone also enjoyed pizza and other goodies after the shopping.

Foster-Adoptive Holiday Party

Foster care staff at the Baldwin Road District hosted their annual party Dec. 7 for about 100 kids and their families with about 300 folks attending at the Central United Methodist Church in Waterford. Like last year, there was plenty of food and fun crafts for the children as well as Rainbow the Clown entertaining the kids with his balloon making. Santa made an appearance of course and had gifts for all the children. This annual event was organized by the foster home licensing staff members, **Mary Strand** and **Dave Patyi**, and their supervisor, **Kathleen Banfield**, but they could not have pulled it off without the generous help of many staff who volunteered their time. Thanks again to everyone for making Christmas 2007 special for so many Oakland County children and families.

Even our beloved animals weren't forgotten

Oakland County staff joined fundraising for the “Mega March for the Animals” held in October in Detroit. This event is sponsored by Michigan Humane Society. Staff from the Baldwin Road, Walled Lake and Saginaw Street districts raised \$1,836 for the animals. This bested our efforts of last year. The Saginaw Street District office took the “top dog” prize again by raising \$1,336 for this worthwhile cause! Kudos to **Bill Holland**, district manager, and your generous staff! One of the big fundraising events at that office included the auctioning off of a quilt handmade by **Jenine Overby**. The quilt was even personalized noting Michigan Humane Society Mega March for the Animals 2007. Believe it or not, I won the quilt (fair and square) and have decided to donate it to the Michigan Humane Society where it will be auctioned off at their annual Bow Wow Brunch on April 13. In total, the Michigan Humane Society raised over \$250,000 to benefit the animals. There were over 4,500 walkers in the march.



Kim Korona from Michigan Humane Society poses with a quilt made by Jenine Overby of DHS-Oakland County. Overby made the quilt as part of the county's fundraising effort with Michigan Humane Society.

Kudos for Traverse City DDS giving

From John DeSpelder, Area Administrator

Northern Service Area, Disability Determination Service

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The Traverse City Disability Determination Service office observes the holiday season by giving generously to the community. This year was no exception. Starting Dec. 4 the office held its final Michigan Community Blood Centers blood drive of the season with 15 staff members participating. The office also traditionally gives to several charities.

The local National Association of Disability Examiners, or NADE, subchapter sponsored its annual "Pets and People" food drive. This year, the office's donations were given to the Traverse City Goodwill Inn, the Petsafe Rescue Alliance, and A.C. Paws. As in past years, NADE sponsored two families through the Thomas Judd Foundation, a group that provides care and support for families with members with HIV/AIDS.

The office's biggest effort this year was the DDS Mitten Challenge. The goal of 100 pairs of mittens, many of which were hand-made, was nearly doubled, a total of 196 in all! There were even scarves and hats included in the giving. Staff donated \$119 and knitters, crochet and sewing enthusiasts were busy too. Even some our DDS retirees were involved.

For weeks, the mittens were strung around the office lobby as a visual reminder. It was thrilling to see their numbers grow. Delivery of the mittens and other items was made to the local DHS Grand Traverse-Leelanau county office, Great Lakes Community Mental Health, and local schools. A special early delivery was made to the Women's Resource Center when there were news announcements that they had run out of cold-weather clothing because of an early cold snap.

Thanks to all who spearheaded and participated in this year's giving. It isn't possible to mention everybody by name, there are so many—special thanks to [Jane Mullins](#), [Mike O'Connor](#), [Ruth Cilke](#), and [Cheryl Patterson](#) for heading up, respectively, the Michigan Community Blood Centers drive, the NADE Pets and People drive, the Thomas Judd Foundation family sponsorship, and the DDS Mitten Challenge.

■ A unit of federal government administered through DHS, Disability Determination Service offices provide initial determination for Social Security disability programs according to Social Security Administration rules and regulations.

Date: Feb. 1

To: [Jon Waara](#), Adult Protective Services specialist
Oceana County DHS, Hart

Subj: You say it's your job

I know you say it's your job but I do feel you go above and beyond. You don't know how much it means to have someone to talk to about my mom that understands. You're a great listener and a very caring person. Thank you for all you have done or tried to do for my mom, me and my family. May God bless you. Thank you so much!

[Michelle Dowling](#)

Austin, Texas

■ The author is a relative of one of Jon Waara's cases. Kathy Sholty, children's services supervisor at Oceana DHS, submitted this letter for publication.

Date: Jan. 9

To: [Henrietta Davis](#), Foster Care Specialist
Macomb County DHS, Clinton Township

Subj: What can I say?

Ok, what can I say? There aren't enough words I can come up with to tell you how happy I am that I get to work with you again! You are by far the best caseworker I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. I received my first check for (name deleted) today. If there was an award for employee of the year, you would win it hands down! Thank you again for everything you do. On this end, you are most appreciated.

[Ken Baggallay](#)

Clinton Township

■ The author is a Macomb County licensed foster parent. Kathy Larkins – Henrietta Davis's supervisor – submitted this letter for publication. DHS Matters! deleted a name we didn't have permission to use.

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